

Show Me Where to Look (Tell Me What Will I Find) by osaki_nana_707

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Summary:

Max is back in town for Spring Break. They might not have fixed their relationship, but they can at least fix breakfast.

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Author's Note:

please read the other stories first or things in this one might not make sense. Thanks! :)

Show Me Where to Look (Tell Me What Will I Find)

It's a balmy morning the first day of Spring Break. Billy supposes it's not *technically* the first day of Spring Break because it's Saturday and Katie doesn't start her week off of school until Monday, but she and Billy celebrated last night anyway, watching horror movies and eating stuffed crust pizza. He's got to spend the time with her that he can because she's going to be spending most of her time at Steve's house for the next week since Billy doesn't get Spring Break at the police station, no matter how molasses-slow Hawkins' crime rate is.

He'd needed it, really. A night just to sit and laugh at bad special effects with her had shaken off the bad feelings that still lingered from his conversation with Beth a couple of weeks ago. He can't smoke it out of his system, and he can't sleep it off, so he's been burying himself in work in order to not think about it.

That'd be easy enough, of course, if it wasn't the only thing he was avoiding thinking about, but that subject is so untouchable he won't even acknowledge it when it's staring him straight in the face with soft brown eyes and squeezing his hand.

Anyway... the movies and dinner with Katie had been good because he'd been working himself towards a full-on burnout. Katie has a way of making his troubles disappear, or at least make them seem small enough that he can fight them off. He's not really sure if it's because his own fears are weaker in her presence, or if he's just stronger because of her. He doesn't question it because he's always found it better not to question his instincts.

Katie's sleeping in this morning though, and Billy's got no one else around to distract himself with, so he's under the Camaro. The

damned thing isn't purring like she used to, and even though he's tried to keep her in good shape, he's had to spend more and more time trying to get her running right. He's not sure how much longer she's going to last.

He's underneath the car on his plastic creeper, tuning it up when he hears a car door slam from the street. He doesn't think anything of it until footsteps approach, and then he's being pulled out from under with his tools still in hand.

Max stands over him, her curtain of red hair falling over one shoulder. She's got the unslept look of the typical college student, a striped top and high-waisted jeans rolled up at the ankles. Her tennis shoes are worn out, probably from skateboarding around California. "Hey," she says casually, like she hasn't just appeared out of nowhere with no warning.

"What are you doing here?" Billy asks.

"It's my house, dipshit," she says, swinging her backpack over her shoulder and heading for the door. Billy wipes his black-stained hands on his shirt and gets up, following after her.

"I know it's your house," he says, annoyed. "You didn't say you were coming back though."

"It's Spring Break," she says, tossing her bag in a corner and going for the kitchen. "Where else would I go?"

"If I was you, I wouldn't be goin' anywhere," Billy says. "What, your dad skip town for Spring Break too?"

She glares at him as she pulls a canned drink from the fridge, cracking it open and taking a long sip before saying, "As a matter of fact, yeah. He and Jo went to visit her parents in Arizona."

It takes Billy a moment to remember that Jo is Max's dad's new wife. He doesn't tend to keep up with the romantic lives of people he's never given half a shit about. "So, instead of hitting up Cancun, you come back to the beautiful cow shit town that is Hawkins, Indiana?"

Max takes another swallow of her soda, never breaking eye contact.

She's still as defiant as she's ever been, but she's taller now so it's actually a little intimidating. He's secretly impressed. "Everyone's coming back for a reunion," she says after a beat or two.

"Everyone?"

"Yeah. My friends. You remember. The ones you tried to run over with your shitty Camaro all those years ago."

Billy rolls his eyes. "Jesus fucking Christ, Maxine. I said I was sorry."

"You didn't say sorry for that."

"I said I was sorry for being a dick. It sort of fell under the category."

"You only said sorry because I let you live here."

"I meant it."

"Did you?"

She takes another long, loud slurp. The air is tense. He wonders if Max had a bad flight which is why she showed up ready to fight, but then again, this is sort of their rapport. They kind of just do this all the time. It's only slightly better than it was back then, and only because Max can hold her own against him now. Billy's not as tough as he used to be, and Max is tougher than she's ever been.

"Where's Katie?" she asks.

"Sleeping. It's Saturday and she's five. What do you expect?"

She shrugs. "I watched cartoons on Saturday morning."

"She does that too sometimes. I let her do what she wants on the weekends."

Max seems less hostile now that they're talking about Katie. Billy goes to the sink and starts washing his hands. "How's school?" he asks, just trying to make conversation. Her shoulders tense, and he knows it's the wrong thing to say. He sort of knew even before he asked that he shouldn't, but his volatile nature can't help but be

pulled out of him when she's around.

For all intents and purposes, Max should have graduated by now, but she hasn't actually managed to get a Bachelor's Degree in anything because she can't seem to decide ultimately what she wants to do. She's changed majors a couple of times, and he's not sure what she's doing now. She's just lucky in the sense that her dad wasn't a piece of shit like his dad, and he also came into quite a bit of money after he married his new wife. He apparently feels guilty about the divorce from Susan because he lets Max live in his house in California and pays for her various whims. Billy can't help but be a little bitter because she doesn't seem to be grateful for this at all.

He wishes he had a cigarette. He chews on his thumbnail. His nails were just now growing back now too, damn it.

"It's fine," she says in the way that cements that it is the end of the discussion.

Billy shrugs a shoulder and decides to push further because he's never been very good at allowing himself to shut up when he should. "How's Sinclair?"

Her gaze turns sharply on him. "Why is that any of your business?"

"It's not," he says. "Just curious if your relationship had gone to shit for the eight millionth time."

"Like you have any fucking room to be talking about relationships," she says, voice low but dripping with malice. Billy kind of enjoys it because it feels familiar. It's not as unsteady and strange as the sweet, reassuring conversations he has with Steve. He knows how to respond to anger. He knows how to revel in it. He's been trying not to be angry, trying not to allow his anger, so the opportunity to bare his teeth a bit is hard for him to pass up right now.

"I'm not the one in an on-again-off-again relationship with my middle school boyfriend," he says, and it's a tame response, but it still gets her fired up. He relishes in the heat in her face, the way her jaw clenches.

“You had a baby with a drug addict,” she says.

“Fuck you,” Billy says, leaning against the counter. “I got out of the relationship when I saw it was going to shit.”

“That relationship was always shit,” she says, and Billy... laughs. She seems a little surprised by the sound too.

“I think we can agree on that one,” he says easily, and his desire to pick and prod and fight has faded. His fire is out. He didn’t know it could be smothered so easily. “So, like, do you want me and Katie to get the fuck out for the week or is it cool if we still stay here?”

“It’s... it’s fine,” she says, blinking rapidly, like she’s trying to make sure her eyes haven’t put the image of Billy Hargrove where someone else should be. “I mean, where else would you even go?”

“Steve’s, probably.”

She snorts. “Real funny.”

“I’m not joking.”

“Then you must be talking about some other Steve because the Steve Harrington I know would...” she trails off, then sighs. “Actually, you know what? He totally would. He’s a bleeding-fucking-heart.”

“Right again,” Billy says, grinning, “but believe it or not, it’s not because of his bleeding-fucking-heart. He’s got a kid too, and she and Katie are best friends. Katie’d probably throw a tantrum if her dear old Dad had to sleep in the Camaro while she cuddled up real good in Steve’s posh house.”

He’s messing around, but he doesn’t like the mental image that it leaves him with—a memory from a couple of years ago, when he really had nothing. A night or two when he really did have to camp out in the Camaro, parked near the beach with a very young Katie asleep on his chest. Beth was in the front seat, a needle in her arm because she thought he was asleep, thought that she was getting away with it, thought he had no fucking idea she was back on that shit even though they’d lost their apartment after she drained the bank account.

He brings himself back to the present to see Max's big blue eyes softening a little, almost like she can see it too, even though she has no idea. Billy never told her about it.

"You want breakfast?" he asks. "I can make some eggs or something."

"What are you on? You've never offered to make me breakfast."

"Well, I'm hungry and you're also here," Billy says, going to the fridge and getting out the eggs. "Do you want some fucking eggs or not?"

She puts her soda down and starts going through the cabinets. She never answers the question, but she starts getting out the makings for pancakes, and all too suddenly they're silently making breakfast together. Billy's got the makings of a ham and cheese omelet going on and Max has already made a short stack of flapjacks before she speaks again.

"So," she says hesitantly, tiptoeing into the question, "how have you been?"

Billy plates one omelet and starts cracking the eggs for another one. "I'm... good," he says, and he's surprised how much he means it. "Katie's doing pretty good in school. I'm making good money. The quitting smoking thing sucks, but I'm getting used to it."

"You quit smoking?" she says, voice pitched higher with shock. "Haven't you been smoking since you were like, eleven?"

"Thirteen," he replies, "but it was part of the job conditions."

"I thought you were a mechanic."

"No, I uh... I found something else," he evades. She doesn't need to know he got fired. He knows she'll hold it against him. "Besides, it's... better. Katie doesn't need to be breathing that shit in."

"What's brought about this mission of self-reflection?" she asks, voice sardonic. It rises his hackles, makes him want to spit a retort in defense. His head even jerks on his neck when she says it, and he can feel the words pressing against the backs of his teeth. For a moment

all he can hear in his head is *worthless piece of shit, so fucking stupid, not capable of learning respect and responsibility.*

He's not sure if it's his dad's voice or his own that's curling nastily around his brain. That's the part of him that scares him the most.

"Fuck off," he mumbles. "Not all of us have a parent to fund our constantly changing missions of self-reflections, Maxine. Some of us have to do it on our own."

Heat rises in her face. Her lips thin. He can see the shame that wells up, but she doesn't respond to it, doesn't acknowledge it. She shoves it back down, down, down. He likes to think she learned that from him.

Billy looks away. He's not ashamed of himself for hurting her, but he thinks he should be.

They finish cooking breakfast together in silence, not even looking at each other. Billy fries bacon. Max butters the pancakes. They're setting the table together, setting the silverware down too hard as if they have to alert each other to their presence when Katie comes wandering in. Her hair is a tangled mess, and she's wearing one of Billy's old band t-shirts as a nightgown. The collar hangs over the edge of a little shoulder. She blinks owlishly at Max when she realizes her kitchen and her breakfast is not just for the two of them.

"Max," Katie greets curtly, like they're business partners instead of sort-of related.

"Hey, kid," Max says, smiling with relief that Billy's no longer the only person around to talk to. Billy kind of shares that relief.

"What are you doing here?" she asks. When Katie asks it, she gets an answer more easily and more kindly than Billy did.

"Thought I'd come back and see my mom," she says, "and some of my friends are having a get-together this week so I wanted to be there for that too."

"Is it the same thing Harrington's going to?" Katie asks.

"Your dad did say you've become pretty good friends with Steve," Max says, sitting down at the table, managing to not look tense and uncomfortable.

Katie laughs, climbing into her own chair. "No. I mean, Harrington's pretty cool, I guess, but he's more Dad's friend. I'm friends with Hannah. She's the best."

Billy suddenly doesn't want to be there. Max turns her head to look at him, brows meeting in the middle of her forehead. "*Friends?*" she snorts.

Billy's fire lights up again. He has to fight every instinct in his body to calm down because how fucking dare she say it like that? "You think I can't have friends?" he asks, and his voice is darker than he's used to. He hadn't realized how much light had gotten in until he shut the curtains on it. Katie even looks a little taken aback by it.

"That's not what I said," Max says, back straightening, and for a moment she's thirteen again. She's thirteen and sitting in the passenger seat of a Camaro that's going too fast. Apparently, he can still spark some fear in her after all. "I just didn't think you and Steve would be friends."

"Why not?" Katie asks, and Billy feels a little touched by her misguided offense over it.

He starts shoving food into his mouth so he doesn't have to talk. He doesn't tell Max that the pancakes are fucking amazing, even though they are. He bets she gets up on Saturdays and makes them with her dad and stepmom and it's fucking picture perfect in sunny California. He hates the way it hurts him, picturing her happy in a functioning family unit. It's unfair, sure, that Billy's never had it, and when he had the opportunity to make one, he fucked it up, but he's calloused that part of him a long time ago. Max's presence just makes him feel vulnerable somehow, makes him feel threatened... not by her, though. No, it's the piece of him that he used to be that he's scared of. The piece of him that beat the fucking daylight out of Steve ten years ago because he was so fucking angry. The piece of him that *doesn't* deserve to be Steve's friend.

"It's nothing," Maxine says. "It's just that they weren't exactly best friends in high school, y'know?" She doesn't seem interested in explaining how unstable Billy used to be to his own daughter, and Billy's grateful for that.

Katie shrugs, grabbing a piece of bacon. "Well, they're friends," she says. "Harrington's the only person Dad hangs out with besides me. They talk all the time, and sometimes they even hold hands."

Max's eyebrows crawl towards her hairline. Billy very much wants to sink into the floor.

"No, we don't, Katie," Billy says, and fuck, *fuck*, his face feels like it's one-thousand degrees.

"But I saw you at the McDonald's when we all went ice skating together," Katie argues.

"You weren't even at the table."

"I saw through the window thingy of the tunnel," she says.

"That's not what you saw," Billy says, trying to remain calm, trying not to panic, trying not to look at Max who is looking at him oh God could she *stop looking at him*—

"I know what I saw," Katie says, puffing up, indignant and ready to fight. "Harrington reached out like this." She reaches across the table and puts her little hand on top of his.

Billy feels his own fire climbing, his desire to defend himself, to fight back, and he just... lets it die. It's as easy as the touch of her fingers on his knuckles.

"That's not holding hands," he clarifies, turning his hand over so that he can take her hand. "This is."

"So. Hand-touching then," Katie corrects herself.

Max is still staring, Billy knows. He isn't looking at her, but he can feel her eyes boring into his skull. Of course, she knows a lot more than Katie does. She knows a lot more than she should.

"He was just trying to comfort me because I was sad," Billy says gently, hoping it's enough of an explanation for both of them, one that won't dredge up too many questions.

"You were sad?" Katie asks, voice smaller. It makes Billy's heart crack a little. "Why were you sad?"

"Grown-ups just get sad sometimes for no reason," Billy offers. "It's not a big deal. Eat your breakfast before it gets cold. We'll talk about it later, alright?"

"But—"

"*Later*," he stresses, squeezes her hand and lets go. Katie seems to understand and actually *does* go back to eating her breakfast. Maybe this talking-to-her thing Steve suggested isn't so hard after all.

"Well," she says around a mouthful of omelet, "if grown-ups get sad for no reason I don't wanna grow up."

"Don't," Billy says. "It's a trap."

She grins. He does too. He still doesn't look at Max.

Max can't seem to stand it, so she speaks. "This bacon... it's good."

It's not her most graceful rescue, and it's a little late now that Billy's basically saved himself, but he finds himself appreciating it anyway.

"Thanks," he says. "I'm actually pretty good at cooking, you know?"

"Then I guess you'll just have to make all of the meals while I'm in town," Max says, corners of her mouth turning up.

"If you buy the groceries, I'll make you a fucking feast."

"Dad, you can't say fucking."

Max blinks slowly in surprise. Billy shrugs.

"Can't say fucking?" Max queries.

"Yeah, and you can't either. Pass the syrup."

Billy thinks of Max and her dad and her stepmom cooking breakfast together, sharing breakfast together, one big and disgustingly happy family. He's never had that. He doesn't know if he ever will have that... but he thinks this moment comes at least kind of close.

He knows this won't last, that he's going to have to explain himself, or at least explain his way out of explaining himself, but his fire is out, and his curtains are open, and for a moment, just a moment, he's going to let the light in.

It's been pretty good for him so far.

Author's Note:

i'm on [tumblr](#).